



97: Far Away by cali-chan

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Summary: He couldn't take his eyes off her, but... not in the good way. He couldn't bring himself to look away from her face, because [...] in the most nightmarish, anxious moments, when she seemed the weakest, he feared if he turned his gaze away from her for even a second, he might never see her again. PG-13, drama/angst, post-S2, Mike/Eleven.

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Note: I quite literally vented all the fluff outta my system with *Geek on Fleek*, so you should be warned that this (and probably my next few stories, if they happen) is going to be more on the sad/angsty side. Also, this one goes out to **FunloveHa** over at FFN, who wondered in my reviews for *Thank You for (Not) Smoking* about a scenario where Hopper tells Mike about what happened to Sara, and that sparked this idea. (Sorry it's probably even gloomier than you thought it would be.)

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He couldn't take his eyes off her.

Yeah, he couldn't take his eyes off her, but... not in the good way. He couldn't bring himself to look away from her face, because he felt if he did, he might miss her moving or opening her eyes. Or worse. In the most nightmarish, anxious moments, when she seemed the weakest, he feared if he turned his gaze away from her for even a second, he might never see her again.

With a deep, shaky sigh, Mike let himself slide down against the backrest of the chair he was sitting on, his eyes lingering over El's form on the bed. She was so pale. Even with the IV drip Dr. Owens got for her, she was still so pale that he could see the dark veins around her eyes, and it scared the shit out of Mike. It reminded him of the day he lost her the first time, and it terrified him to think that it could happen again.

He didn't want it to happen again; he would give anything for her to open her eyes and come out of this coma right now, but there was nothing he could do to make that happen. He wasn't a doctor or a scientist; he wasn't even family. He was just a powerless kid. That was probably the most frustrating part of all of this.

He had known, he remembered. They all had known there was something off with her over the past few weeks. They'd all thought it was just residual exhaustion from her latest Upside Down encounter; she'd expended so much energy that day, of course she was going to be woozy and sickly for a few days. But "a few days" turned into "a couple of weeks" and she didn't seem to get better, and they started to get worried. Not enough to say it out loud, he recognized, and perhaps that had been their biggest mistake. *His* biggest mistake. He'd been scared to admit there was something wrong because that would make it real. They'd been on the verge of the school year starting, and he'd figured once El got back into the routine, the tiredness in her eyes would disappear on its own.

Except before any of that could happen, he got that desperate call out of the blue one afternoon letting him know that she had fallen unconscious and wasn't responding, and he needed to get to her place straight away. And because he'd ignored the signs, now she'd been like this for an entire week, and he couldn't do anything to make it better.

To be fair, he hadn't been the only one. But really, what kind of crappy boyfriend was he? He was supposed to know her better than anyone, and he'd failed her.

Again.

Jerkily, he pushed himself forward, leaning his upper body weight on his elbows against his knees, so he could grab hold of her hand. This was something that happened often when he was keeping vigil over her, because in the silence of the room his thoughts often got the better of him, and in order to snap himself out of it, he would move around and fidget in different ways, like he couldn't find a comfortable position.

He brought her hand up to his lips, kissing the back of it lightly

before cradling it between both of his. "El?" he tried for what felt like the hundredth time just that day. Mr. Clarke had taught them in class back in middle school that some scientists believed that people in comas could actually hear sounds around them such as people talking to them, and it was that hope that Mike clung to with every fiber of his being.

"El, can you hear me?" he insisted, but there was no response. No movement, no sound, not even a noticeable change in her breathing pattern. Her hand remained completely inert between his. He sighed again, this time in disappointment.

A second later, he was startled by an unexpected voice. "Nothing?" Mike jumped, turning to see Hopper leaning against the doorframe, a pretty-much-permanent concerned expression on his face as he looked at his adopted daughter on the bed.

Mike clenched his jaw, once again angry at his (all of their) uselessness. He shook his head, which was enough to let Hopper know there was no change without, you know, screaming in frustration like he wanted to. It wasn't the first time he'd asked. The answer was always the same.

Hopper pushed his weight away from the doorframe like it took a lot of effort, then walked into the room, leaning against the wall directly in front of El's bed with his arms crossed. "You can't keep missing school to come here, kid," he declared in a no-nonsense tone. "She wouldn't want that."

It wasn't the first time he pointed *that* out, either, and normally Mike would agree if it weren't for the way he phrased it, which only made him angrier. "Stop talking about her like she's *dead*," he snapped, glaring at the older man. "She's gonna wake up. I know she will."

He turned back to the bed. "Besides, there's no point in being there if all I can do is think about being here," he admitted begrudgingly. He had tried going to school, he really had, but it wasn't easy to concentrate on his classes when he was worried about El every second of the day.

By day two he was already cutting class to come see her earlier than

he normally would, and he had done so every day that week and would continue to do it as long as it took for her to wake up. He was sure his unexplained absences would catch up to him eventually, but for the moment he didn't care. El was more important. And it was only the first week of classes, anyway; it's not like he was missing much. His friends always brought him back his homework assignments anyway, as Max had just earlier that day.

Hopper sighed, almost resigned. "Still. I'm a cop, I'm not supposed to be enabling truancy," he insisted, although he didn't sound *too* bothered. "Your mother's going to have my head if you keep doing this."

Mike grimaced. "I'll deal with my mother," he affirmed, which was true, although he wasn't sure what he was even going to say to her to make sense of all of this. He figured he'd cross that bridge when he came to it. So far, his mom was none the wiser about what was going on, and he intended to keep it that way for as long as possible. "I just need to be here, okay? If that's the only thing I can do for her, then that's what I'm going to do."

Hopper looked at him for a minute, as if measuring up his determination. Then he pushed away from the wall and took a couple of steps closer to the bed. "Did El ever mention my daughter Sara?" he asked out of the blue, surprising Mike with his sudden shift in topic.

Mike squirmed slightly, wondering where the man was going with this. "She just told me she died," he mumbled carefully. El had only really mentioned it in passing because she thought it was Hopper's story to tell, and he should be the one who chose whether or not to disclose it. Mike could agree with that.

It seemed that now Hopper had chosen to disclose it to him, and it turned out that Mike wasn't sure he wanted to hear it given the circumstances. Nonetheless, Hopper elaborated. "She had cancer," he explained in a grave tone, his eyes fixed on Eleven's form on the bed. "We only realized something was wrong with her when she started having seizures. By that point it was too late," he admitted, and Mike swore he could hear an undercurrent of remorse in his voice. "There wasn't really much the doctors could do to save her."

Mike knew where he was going with this, and he wished he wouldn't, because as sad as Sara's circumstances had been, he didn't think that had anything to do with Eleven's current predicament at all. But Hopper went ahead to make the point anyway. "If she doesn't wake up soon, we might have to take her to Chicago for imagining."

Mike's head snapped toward him so quickly his neck actually cracked. "You can't!" he exclaimed, wide eyes punctuating the panic Hopper's words inspired in him. "You heard what Dr. Owens said about hospitals, it's too risky—"

"Owens can get her IV solutions but he can't bring an imaging machine in here," Hopper retorted sternly, not backing down. "We've talked about this; he knows that's what it might come down to. If risking exposure is the only way to ensure she stays *alive*, then—"

"El doesn't have *cancer*," Mike spat out, pushing himself to his feet and barely managing not to fly at the larger man fists first. "Look, I'm sorry about Sara, okay? But that doesn't mean the same thing's gonna happen to Eleven. This isn't some illness; it has something to do with her powers. I know it does! The lights keep flickering, and things around here keep moving—"

He actually wasn't a hundred percent *certain* of that. Yes, the lights did flicker, but that *could* conceivably be a problem with the wiring, and he hadn't actually *seen* any objects moving, he just noticed that sometimes things weren't in the same place where he'd left them earlier. Sure, it *could* be a coincidence; he just chose to believe it wasn't.

"I know, kid, and I believe you," Hopper tried to strike a conciliatory tone for a moment, but then shook his head. "I'm just saying: the two might not be mutually exclusive." He walked around the bed until he was standing next to Mike and lifted a hand to his shoulder. "We don't know what her powers are. Hell, Owens was in charge of her case and even *he* has no idea where they come from. But we know they take a physical toll on her," he added, nodding his head toward his daughter's form on the bed. "For God's sake, she gets nosebleeds, or worse, every time she uses her powers. If there's one thing I know, it's that bleeding is *never* a good thing," he declared with finality to his words.

Mike knew he was right; he worried about the nosebleeds constantly himself, always double and triple checking that El was okay and felt healthy whenever she used her powers. He knew how this type of bleeding worked, that it had to involve enough pressure inside her head to burst blood vessels. He didn't know what *caused* that pressure, but he knew it could be dangerous.

Maybe it was another case of how admitting it out loud might make it real. Or maybe he just hoped there was a smaller chance of her having a brain tumor than of her getting found out while in the hospital. So many things could go wrong. The doctors might find something extraordinary in her physiology, or she could be put in a situation that caused her powers to go out of control. The risk was so high, to the point that Mike wanted to just wrap his arms around her and keep Hopper, or anyone else, from moving her off that bed.

He knew if it came down to it, that's what they'd have to do. But... "It won't come down to that," he muttered, determined. El was going to wake up soon. He knew she would.

Hopper rolled his eyes, looking like he knew this was a battle he wasn't going to win. "Givin' me a headache, kid," he said, shaking his head as if he couldn't believe Mike's stubbornness. "You want to stay here so badly, you can watch over her for me for a while. I'm going out for a smoke," he added, lifting his hand off Mike's shoulder and turning toward the door.

"I think Max is out there," Mike warned just before losing sight of him. *Probably crying* was what he didn't say, though they both knew that was likely. Max had been the only person who was with El the day she collapsed, and the trauma of that moment hit her really hard. When she visited, she often ended up having to go outside so she could cry without anyone seeing her. Mike knew, and she knew he knew, but they never mentioned it. He could let her have that. So could Hopper.

He sat down again and reached for El's hand just as he had before. "El?" he tried again. He leaned forward, leveling his weight on his elbows on the edge of the bed. "I don't know if you can hear me, but... you have to wake up, El," he pleaded. "We don't know what to do. We don't know what's wrong with you, and we're running out of

options... so you're gonna have to come out of this on your own, okay? Please, *please* open your eyes."

He sniffled, his eyes already starting to water. "Hopper likes to seem like he knows exactly what he's doing, but I can tell it's killing him to see you like this, El," he intimated, his voice starting to tremble halfway through that last sentence. "He told me what happened to Sara. I think he's worried the same thing will happen to you. That he'll have to see another daughter die."

He had to swallow a knot in his throat before he could continue speaking. "The guys are all really worried about you. Dustin isn't even making jokes anymore. And Max... she kinda went to pieces a little bit," he revealed, lowering his voice a little in case the redhead was around. "She's also afraid of losing someone she cares about, I think. That's what Lucas says, at least. She already only sees her father on holidays; she doesn't want to only see you in this bed."

He lifted a hand to his cheek to wipe away the first tear that escaped his right eye. "And I'm... I'm kind of a mess," he admitted, somewhat ashamed. Hopper was right; El wouldn't want him missing school on her account. "I can't concentrate in class, I'm not sleeping, I'm barely spending any time home... even when I'm not here with you, I'm still thinking about you."

More tears started dropping, so many that his hand couldn't wipe them fast enough. "But this isn't like when Will went missing, because I could go out and look for him, you know? And even when I thought you were in the Upside Down, I could still try and call you, hope that maybe you were listening, but now..." His voice caught, and his hold on her hand tightened. "I'm just... you're right here, but you still feel so far away."

He bent forward so he could lean his forehead against her pale knuckles. "You need to wake up, El," he repeated, closing his eyes in his fervor. "You need to get better. We're all so scared..." He sobbed. "We miss you so much. We need you. *I* need you. And I can't... I can't lose you again. I can't. I..."

His voice trailed off as he sobbed into her hand, letting all his feelings of fear, anger, and disappointment flow out of him with his

tears. He didn't know how long he remained in that position— it must've taken two or three minutes for the crying to subside, but he'd been just about to straighten up when the loud sound of several pieces of glass breaking at the same time startled him upright.

"What the—" He moved to stand up, struggling a bit because his feet were tangled on the bedsheets hanging off the side of El's bed, and by the time he got them untangled, Max had appeared at El's bedroom door, having run all the way from the front porch with Hopper in tow. "What was that?!"

"Are you okay?!" Max exclaimed, wide-eyed and out of breath. "All the windows in the living room just exploded— *holy shit!*" she cut herself off abruptly, pointing at something above Mike's head. Hopper, more inclined to react than to stop and stare at things slackjawed, pushed past Max and ran to El's side, starting to shake her as if trying to wake her.

Mike looked above him and saw there were several things floating in the air above his head: El's nightlamp, books and notebooks, a teddy bear, a bunch of colored pencils, Mike's own bookbag. They were all floating about a foot below the ceiling, moving back and forth as if in free motion, shadows bearing down on the inhabitants of the room whenever one of the objects floated below the ceiling lamp.

Suddenly, every floating object stopped in its place, and a second later they all started flying at high speeds in different directions. Max had to dodge behind the door to avoid getting hit by the nightlamp, which flew past her and crashed loudly somewhere in the living room. Hopper had to lie flat on the floor when the colored pencils flew right through the space his head had occupied a second earlier to embed themselves into the wall. Mike wasn't fast enough so he was hit, although thankfully it was only the teddy bear flying into his shoulder and not something potentially deadly.

As Hopper slowly pushed himself back up to his feet, Mike rushed to El's side and grasped her hand again, so he could continue trying to wake her up. "El? El, if you can hear me, you need to wake up *now*, you're making things around us levitate and—" He dodged the stand of her IV drip, which wasn't floating but got knocked down in the chaos. "—El! You have to stop this, or someone's going to get hurt!"

For a moment he thought she might have squeezed his hand weakly, but he couldn't be sure, because that was the moment the objects still levitating aimlessly above their heads stopped in place and, a second later, dropped to the ground.

The three of them turned to El in unison, just in time to catch her stirring, head moving slightly to the side as her expression, eyes still closed, drew into a slight grimace. "El?" Mike started, on bated breath. "El, are you awake?" He knew it was a dumb question, but he couldn't really think straight with his heart beating a mile a minute inside his chest cavity.

It took a heartbeat or two, while they all looked down at her expectantly, for her eyes to flutter open for the first time in a week. Mike heard Hopper let out a shaky, relieved sigh, but he didn't look up, unable to take his eyes off of her, gazing directly into her lively, if a little confused, brown eyes for the first time in what felt like too long.

Hopper leaned forward to drop a kiss on her forehead. "Missed you, kiddo," he said before turning toward the door. "Red, go get her a glass of water," he directed toward the redhead, who seemed so stunned by Eleven waking up that she didn't notice the tears of relief rolling down her cheeks. She nodded and ran off to the kitchen. "I'm gonna go call Doc Owens," Hopper declared, following Max out the door.

El's anxious gaze turned from Hopper's retreating form to Mike, and he could see the question in her expression. "Mike...?" she whispered, her voice hoarse from lack of use. He tried to tell her not to speak until Max brought back that glass of water, but she still managed to get "What happened?" out regardless.

"Shh, shh, it's okay," he tried to soothe her obvious panic. "You blacked out while you and Max were hanging out and you've been unconscious for about six days," he let her know, because she wanted to understand what was going on and friends don't lie. He knew that would make her even more uneasy, however, and her widening eyes confirmed that a moment later. "But it's okay. You're awake now, and Dr. Owens is going to run some tests, and we'll know what happened, all right?"

She didn't seem so sure, but she didn't try to speak anymore; at least that was something. "We're going to get all this sorted out, okay? I promise. All that matters is that you're awake now," he added, lifting a hand to push a stray curl of her hair away from her face. "We're here with you. You're home."

She looked at him like she wanted to hug him, but she was still too weak to push herself to a sitting position. So instead she squeezed his hand, which brought a tremulous smile to his face. He leaned forward and pressed a quick peck on her lips, and saw her close her eyes momentarily. Just a heartbeat. She wasn't falling back to the depths of unconsciousness; she was staying with him. "You're right here," he whispered, leaning his forehead against hers and closing his eyes without fear of losing her for the first time in a week.

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Notes: Why, yes, I titled this after a Nickelback song. Go ahead, COME AT ME, BRO. xD

I tried to keep this one super vague because I truly think this is something the Duffers are totally, absolutely, definitively going to touch upon on the show. I have lived on this green Earth long enough, and have been reading fiction and watching TV long enough, to agree with Hopper here: *nosebleeds are never a good thing*. You know this is coming. Maybe not in season three, but at some point. I'm just helping y'all mentally prepare. You're welcome.

PS: I'm so bad at writing "action" scenes, I'm sorry. D: